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SECURITY COUNCIL
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Letter dated 30 December 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to bring to your attention the following developments concerning the continuing destruction inflicted on the cultural heritage of the occupied area of Cyprus:

On again I would like to point out that while the Cyprus Government zealously protects places of worship belonging to all faiths in Cyprus, Turkey not only has refused to adhere to international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions but has been steadfastly continuing its policy of religious intolerance in the occupied areas. More recently, the following grave violations were committed:

- The Church of St. George, in the village of Prastio in the Famagusta district, has been transformed into a mosque (see photographs 1-4);*
- The Church of Michael the Archangel at Kyrenia has been converted into a museum (see photographs 5-8);
- The Church of the Holy Virgin Chrysopolitissa in Kyrenia has been turned into a mosque (see photographs 9-10);
- The Church of St. George at Kyrenia has been converted into a mosque (see photograph 11);

* The photographs may be consulted at the Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the United Nations.

- The Church of St. Paraskevi in Lapithos has been converted into a mosque (see photograph 12);

- The Church of the Holy Virgin in Karavas has been converted into a mosque (see photograph 13);

- The Church of St. Amvrosios in the village of Ayios Amvrosios has been converted into a mosque (see photograph 14).

Moreover, the following churches, after having been desecrated and looted, have been abandoned to deteriorate and are in danger of collapse:

- The Church of the Holy Virgin (Melandrina), located near the villages of Ayios Amvrosios and Kalogrea (see photographs 15-17);

- The Church of Antifonitis in the village of Ayios Amvrosios (see photographs 18-21);

- The Church of St. Anastasia in Lapithos (see photographs 22-25);

- The Church of St. Irene in Karavas (see photographs 26-28);

- The Church of St. George in Karavas (see photographs 29-31).

The continuous and systematic plundering of the religious and cultural heritage of Cyprus is an act which is contrary to all the principles upon which the United Nations was founded and upon which international law is based. In addition to other gross violations against property in the occupied area, Turkey, as the occupying Power for more than 23 years, is fully responsible and accountable for these new illegal acts.

The documented large-scale destruction of over 500 churches, perpetrated before the eyes of the international community, continues unabated in an effort to Turkify the occupied areas and constitutes an affront to the very credibility of international organizations in general and to the United Nations in particular. The ability to respond effectively and in a timely manner to such gross violations of international law should be a testament to the international community's commitment to the much-cherished principle of the protection of cultural heritage.

It is ironic that this latest illegality comes at a time when the new international order, promoted by the United Nations, considers the protection and safeguarding of human rights as a key element for world peace and understanding.

We have noted with satisfaction that you have included in your latest report to the Security Council, dated 8 December 1997 (S/1997/962, para. 20), our protests concerning the destruction of churches and other religious property and your assurances that the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) is pursuing the matter with the Turkish side.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, I wish once again to strongly protest these acts of wilful and deliberate destruction and to request, Your Excellency, that you call upon the occupying Power to cease and desist from such anachronistic policies and take the necessary measures to stop and reverse them. Moreover, I also request that you inform all relevant human rights mechanisms and include in your next report to the Security Council the results of the investigations by UNFICYP.

I would be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Sotos ZACKHEOS
Ambassador,
Permanent Representative